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ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL QUESTIONS: REPORTS OF SUBSIDIARY BODIES, CONFERENCES AND RELATED QUESTIONS

Elements of a draft programme for the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty

Note by the Secretariat

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INTRODUCTION

1. At its forty-eighth session, the General Assembly, by its resolution 48/183, proclaimed 1996 International Year for the Eradication of Poverty and designated the Economic and Social Council as the coordinating body for the Year. At its forty-ninth session, the Assembly took note of the report of the Secretary-General on the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty (A/49/572), which contained (sect. III) a proposed timetable for preparation of the programme for the Year and, in its resolution 49/110, reaffirmed that the major activities for the observance of the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty should be undertaken at all levels and that assistance should be provided by the United Nations system with a view to creating among States, policy makers and international public opinion a greater awareness of the fact that the eradication of poverty was both a complex and a multidimensional problem and fundamental to reinforcing peace and achieving sustainable development.

2. Also in the resolution 49/110, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General, in consultation with all States, concerned specialized agencies, programmes and organs of the United Nations system, relevant international organizations, non-governmental organizations and interested groups, to achieve at an early date the elaboration of the draft programme concerning the preparations for and observance of the Year, containing the objectives, principles, themes and main recommendations for the Year, which should be consistent with the challenge of poverty and the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development 1/ and the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development, 2/ and to submit a final report thereon to the Assembly for consideration at its fiftieth session, with the aim of ensuring that the Year made a distinct and significant contribution to the efforts to eradicate poverty.

3. The present note takes into account the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development which took place in Copenhagen, 6-12 March 1995. It reflects also the resolutions and decisions adopted at the thirty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, the thirty-fourth session of the Commission for Social Development, and the third session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, as well as Economic and Social Council resolution 1980/67 on the observance of international years and anniversaries, and the results of informal consultations within the United Nations system and with concerned non-governmental organizations.

4. Governments are invited to make comments and suggestions regarding the programme for the observance of the Year. These comments will provide a basis for further consultations within the United Nations system, with other intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, and with interested groups. A final report on the proposed activities for the Year will then be submitted to the General Assembly at its fiftieth session.

I. PRINCIPLES, OBJECTIVES AND THEMES

5. Following the adoption of General Assembly resolutions 48/183 and 49/110, the heads of State and Government meeting in Copenhagen at the World Summit for Social Development launched a global drive for social progress and development embodied in 10 commitments (contained in section C of the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development). Commitment 2 reads in part as follows: "We commit ourselves to the goal of eradicating poverty in the world, through decisive national actions and international cooperation, as an ethical, social, political and economic imperative of humankind". 3/ To this end, heads of State and Government undertook to "formulate or strengthen, as a matter of urgency, and preferably by the year 1996, the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty, national policies and strategies geared to substantially reducing overall poverty in the shortest possible time, reducing inequalities and eradicating absolute poverty by a target date to be specified by each country in its national context". 4/

6. In chapter II of the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development, a strategy for the eradication of poverty is outlined, containing suggestions for priority action at the national level as well as appropriate supporting activities at the international level. The Programme of Action calls on Governments to increase public efforts to eradicate absolute poverty and to reduce overall poverty substantially, inter alia, by "formulating or strengthening, preferably by 1996, and implementing national poverty eradication plans to address the structural causes of poverty, encompassing action on the local, national, subregional, regional and international levels. These plans should establish, within each national context, strategies and affordable time-bound goals and targets for the substantial reduction of overall poverty and the eradication of absolute poverty. In the context of national plans, particular attention should be given to employment creation as a means of eradicating poverty, giving appropriate consideration to health and education, assigning a higher priority to basic social services, generating household income, and promoting access to productive assets and economic opportunities"; 5/ and by "elaborating at the national level, the measurements, criteria and indicators for determining the extent and distribution of absolute poverty. Each country should develop a precise definition and assessment of absolute poverty, preferably by 1996". 6/

7. In chapter V of the Programme of Action on implementation and follow-up, among the requirements specified for the promotion of an integrated approach to the implementation of the Programme of Action at the national level, in accordance with national specificities, is "formulating or strengthening, by 1996, comprehensive cross-sectoral strategies for implementing the Summit outcome and national strategies for social development, including government action, actions by States in cooperation with other Governments, international, regional and subregional organizations, and actions taken in partnership and cooperation with actors of civil society, the private sector and cooperatives, with specific responsibilities to be undertaken by each actor and with agreed priorities and time-frames". 7/

8. The Programme of Action also calls on the General Assembly to review, in 1996, "the effectiveness of the steps taken to implement the outcome of the

Summit with regard to poverty eradication, as part of the activities relating to the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty". 8/ Furthermore, it states that "the General Assembly at its fiftieth session, should declare the first United Nations decade for the eradication of poverty, following the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty (1996), with a view to its considering further initiatives on the eradication of poverty". 9/

9. The concept of poverty developed in the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development is broad. Poverty is perceived as being more than inadequate income, and the concept enlarged to include lack of access to basic services and amenities, lack of security, and exclusion from participation in the life of the community. Discrimination and social inequality are emphasized as significant facets of poverty.

10. The Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development emphasize the need to focus efforts and policies on the root causes of poverty and the necessity to provide for the basic needs of all. These include "the elimination of hunger and malnutrition; the provision of food security, education, employment and livelihood, primary health-care services, including reproductive health care, safe drinking water and sanitation, and adequate shelter; and participation in social and cultural life". 10/ Special priority ought to "be given to the needs and rights of women and children, who often bear the greatest burden of poverty, and to the needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups and persons". 11/ The Programme of Action also stresses that people living in poverty should have access to productive resources, including credit, land, education and training, technology, knowledge and information, and to public services, and should be able to participate in the elaboration of policies and the creation of a regulatory environment that would expand employment and economic opportunities; in addition all people must be provided with adequate economic and social protection during unemployment, ill health, maternity, child-rearing, widowhood, disability and old age.

11. The texts adopted in Copenhagen link the reduction of poverty with the reduction of inequalities. Opportunities for access to resources and income should be enhanced and political, legal, economic and social factors and constraints that foster and sustain inequality should be removed.

12. Furthermore, national budgets and policies should be oriented, as necessary, towards meeting basic needs, reducing inequalities and targeting poverty, as a strategic objective.

13. In the light of General Assembly resolutions 48/183 and 49/110 and of the decisions of the World Summit for Social Development, it would seem that the central theme of the Year could be that the eradication of poverty is a crucial and attainable goal of the international community. It could be emphasized that the struggle against poverty is a struggle for peace and sustainable development; that all Governments, public and private institutions, and members of civil society ought to be involved; that an appropriate mix of national efforts and international measures is required; and that the situation of the most disadvantaged, within and among countries, is the yardstick by which the

quality of societies and of the international community at large ought to be assessed.

II. ACTIVITIES IN OBSERVANCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR FOR THE ERADICATION OF POVERTY

14. The significance of the activities to be undertaken during the Year should be judged largely on the basis of the extent to which they succeed in focusing attention, at all levels and among all elements in society, on the need to take seriously the goal of eradicating poverty and instilling in the public consciousness the sense that this is a reachable goal within a reasonable time-span. Thus the aim of the activities during the Year should be to build the support structure for a longer-term, sustained effort. While the lead-time for the preparation of the programme for the Year has been short in contrast to similar years, the basic programme for the Year is none the less already in place, namely in the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development. The Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development established the necessary policies and actions to eradicate poverty and a major activity of the Year will be to ensure the timely and widespread implementation of the commitments already agreed. How, rather than what, should be the central issue.

15. At the national level, a coordinated approach by all concerned governmental entities, at national and subnational levels, and the widest possible participation of the different groups and actors in society would best help to ensure progress towards eradicating poverty. Such a coordinated approach could be facilitated by the establishment of national coordinating mechanisms, with governmental and non-governmental representation. In the case where such coordinating mechanisms were set up to assist national preparations for the World Summit for Social Development and thus already exist, they might form the nucleus of organizational arrangements for preparing and monitoring national strategies to follow up the Summit, in particular the actions regarding the commitments and recommendations relating to the objective of eradicating poverty. Coordinating bodies, or similar mechanisms at the national level, could also be responsible for disseminating information about the objectives of the Year, particularly at the local level, to encourage actions within the community in observance of the Year, especially local-level initiative for the elaboration of long-term strategies within the context of the proposed decade.

16. At the international level, it was envisaged by the inter-agency meetings held during the sessions of the Preparatory Committee for the World Summit for Social Development that the specialized agencies, the programmes and organs of the United Nations and other concerned intergovernmental organizations, including regional organizations, would give special emphasis and attention to the poverty dimension in the planning of the principal activities, especially the major conference and events, scheduled to take place during 1996, taking into particular account the relevant decisions of the Summit.

17. A number of specialized agencies, and programmes and entities of the United Nations, among them the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank, have started to reorient important activities towards targeting

poverty as a core concern. Country-level dialogue, involving the national authorities and the United Nations system, will need to be strengthened to ensure that such activities fully support, in a coordinated manner, the preparation of national strategies for poverty eradication and their implementation and evaluation.

18. The Year will be launched at a special ceremony in December 1995 during the fiftieth session of the General Assembly, on which occasion a logo for the Year will be made public. Preparations for the design of a logo and a public information campaign built around the logo are under way. In addition, the Department of Public Information of the United Nations Secretariat is preparing information on the activities that it will undertake for the Year from within the regular budget and on additional activities that it will recommend should be undertaken if additional extrabudgetary resources become available.

19. The annex to this note provides a few examples of possible activities at the national level in observance of the Year.

Notes

1/ Report of the World Summit for Social Development, Copenhagen, 6-12 March 1995 (A/CONF.166/9), chap. I, resolution 1, annex I.

2/ Ibid., annex II.

3/ Ibid., annex I, para. 29.

4/ Ibid., commitment 2.

5/ Ibid., annex II, para. 26 (b).

6/ Ibid., para. 26 (d).

7/ Ibid., para. 83 (d).

8/ Ibid., para. 95 (a).

9/ Ibid., para. 95 (c).

10/ Ibid., annex I, para. 29, commitment 2.

11/ Ibid.

Annex

POSSIBLE ACTIVITIES AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL IN OBSERVANCE OF OF THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR FOR THE ERADICATION OF POVERTY

Some possible activities for the Year include:

(a) Organizing information campaigns to publicize the Year, so as to provide people living in poverty and their organizations with a wide forum within which to articulate their problems and suggest solutions, and to mobilize public awareness, participation, stimulation to action and collaboration on matters affecting the poor, so as to enable society to prioritize the struggle against poverty through:

(i) Active involvement of the media and other sources of public information and opinion from the earliest stage onward;

(ii) Organization of a regular, up-to-date information provision and exchange system;

(iii) Creation, production, distribution and use of printed, visual and audio information materials (databases, guides for action, inventories of action, progress reports, booklets, recurrent bulletins/newsletters, circular letters, press releases, press kits, posters, stamps, souvenirs, television and radio programmes, video and audio cassettes, coins, and so forth);

(iv) Involvement of famous personalities in promoting the Year's theme, objectives and activities;

(b) Involving people living in poverty and their organizations in the setting of targets and in the design, implementation, monitoring and assessment of national strategies and programmes for poverty eradication and community-based development, ensuring that such programmes reflect their priorities through:

(i) Encouragement and support of local community development projects that foster the skill, self-reliance and self-confidence of people living in poverty and that facilitate their active participation in efforts to eradicate poverty;

(ii) Support for the creation and development of community organizations and non-profit non-governmental organizations, particularly among disadvantaged and vulnerable people in the spheres of poverty, education, health, social integration, human rights, improvement of the quality of life and relief and rehabilitation, enabling them to participate constructively in policy-making and implementation;

(iii) Effective participation of such organizations in national coordinating mechanisms on observance of the Year, and provision to them of comprehensive information and other facilitative support;

(iv) Provision of resources through such measures as small grant programmes, and technical and other administrative support for initiatives taken and managed at the community level;

(v) Identification of existing national and international non-governmental organizations most concerned with the objectives, principles and themes of the Year and establishment of close collaboration and partnership with them;

(c) Developing and implementing national policies to ensure that people living in poverty have access to economic opportunities that promote sustainable livelihood and basic social services, participate in decision-making and have adequate economic and social protection during unemployment, ill health, maternity, disability and old age through:

(i) Review and appraisal of existing legal systems, programmes and services and their impact on the poor;

(ii) Removal of any political, legal, economic and social factors, constraints and structural barriers that foster and sustain inequality in society and prevent people from escaping poverty;

(iii) Promotion of effective enjoyment by all people of civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights, and of access to existing social protection and public services, in particular through encouraging the ratification and ensuring the full implementation of relevant human rights instruments;

(iv) Establishment of legislative and regulatory frameworks, institutional arrangements and consultative mechanisms for involving community organizations and non-profit non-governmental organizations in the design, implementation and evaluation of social development strategies and programmes;

(d) Research into and studies of different approaches to poverty eradication and dissemination of their results and recommendations to governmental bodies on specific policies and measures through:

(i) Active involvement of academic, research and educational institutions in observation of the Year, including in the work of the national coordinating mechanisms;

(ii) Development, updating and dissemination of specific indicators of poverty and vulnerability, including income, wealth, nutrition, physical and mental health, education, literacy, family conditions, unemployment, social exclusion and isolation, homelessness, landlessness and other factors, as well as indicators of the national and international causes underlying poverty; and, for this purpose, gathering of comprehensive and comparable data, disaggregated by ethnicity, gender, disability, family status, language grouping, region and economic and social sector;

(iii) Monitoring and assessment of the achievement of goals and targets agreed to in international forums in the area of social development; evaluation, quantitatively and qualitatively, of the changes in poverty levels, persistence of poverty and vulnerability to poverty, particularly in terms of household income levels and access to resources and services; and assessment of the effectiveness of poverty eradication strategies, based on the priorities and perceptions of households living in poverty and low-income communities;

(iv) Identification of the livelihood systems, survival strategies and self-help organizations of people living in poverty and work with such organizations to develop programmes for combating poverty that build on their efforts, ensuring the full participation of the people concerned and responding to their actual needs;

(v) Elaboration, at the national level, of the measurements, criteria and indicators for determining the extent and distribution of absolute poverty and its precise definition and assessment;

(vi) Mobilization of the resources of universities and research institutions to improve understanding of the causes of the problem of poverty and the solutions to the problem, as well as of the impact of structural adjustment measures on people living in poverty and the effectiveness of anti-poverty strategies and programmes; strengthening of the capacity for social science research in developing countries; and integration, as appropriate, of the results of research into decision-making processes;

(vii) Organization of national congresses and conferences, expert seminars and workshops to provide a forum for the exchange of opinions, information and experiences and to submit proposals for action;

(e) Campaigns to encourage the involvement in poverty eradication activities of different actors in society such as business enterprises, trade unions, farmers' representative organizations, cooperatives, academic, research and educational institutions, the media and other sources of public information and opinion through:

(i) Development of planning and policy-making procedures that facilitate partnership and cooperation between Governments and civil society in social development;

(ii) Encouragement of business enterprises to pursue investment and other policies, including non-commercial activities, that will contribute to social development, especially in relation to the generation of work opportunities, social support services at the workplace, access to productive resources and construction of infrastructure.